DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 329 VT 019 459

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TITLE	Meeting Our Enemies: Career Education and The Humanities.
PUB DATE	24 Nov 72
NOTE	17p.; Presentation Before the Conference on English Education (Minneapolis, Minn., November 24, 1972)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Aspiration; Academic Education; Background; *Career Education; Cluster Grouping; Concept Formation; Definitions; *Humanities; *Job Training; Occupational Clusters; *Relevance (Education); Speeches; Student Motivation; *Vocational Development
IDENTIFIERS	Career Awareness; *Career Exploration

ABSTRACT

Career education, as viewed by the Division of Education in Washington, is essentially an instructional strategy aimed at improving educational outcomes by relating all teaching and learning activities to the concept of career development. Although teachers of the humanities may fear that career education is fundamentally anti-intellectual and rejects the humanist tradition, academic skills will not be supplanted by vocational preparation, but instead enriched by relating them to relevant vocational interest. Student motivation will be increased by preparing students either for immediate post-secondary employment or further career preparation. Of the 15 occupational clusters identified for career education curriculums, five are presently being developed at the high school level by leading curriculum specialists. We humanists can elaborate and refine career education as well as benefit from the utilitarian aspects of that concept. At its best, work is a humanity and has a central position in the fashioning of a satisfactory human life. (Author/AG)

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MEETING OUR ENEMIES:*

Career Education and the Humanities

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For reasons that I hope become clear later on, my assigned topic reminds me of a comment by one of our lesser known Presidents, Franklin Pierce (1853 to 1857), reinforced by a better known personality, Pogo. While Pierce may not flash to mind when drawing up a list of Great Americans, Pogo may well qualify.

Pierce is quoted from 1855, two years after he assumed the Presidency. The occasion was an off-year election, in which Mr. Pierce's followers hopefully submitted themselves to the verdict of the voters -- and were thoroughly trounced. Reading the dismaying returns, Mr. Pierce commented: "We have met the enemy --- and we are theirs." Pogo's well-known paraphrase, you will recall, is, "We have met the enemy and they are us." (I cannot help wishing that he had had greater respect for an intransitive verb and the predicate nominative. But I am afraid "They are we" just isn't Pogo.)

I anticipate the gist of my remarks today by suggesting that humanists -- among whom, as an English teacher, I number myself -- have done much the same. We have met the enemy, and we are theirs --- or, possibly, they are we. In any event, today I want to talk about an enemy, our enemy, and about the decades-long

*Before the Conference on English Education sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, Leamington Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Friday, November 24, 1972, 1:00 p.m.

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process by which we have allowed ourselves to be steadily trounced by those who regard our discipline as a genteel but fundamentally trivial concern with sweetness, light, and iambic pentameter, and unrelated to the utilitarian world.

Your Executive Secretary, Mr. Hogan, tells me that many of you are disquieted by the notion of career education and concerned about its potential effect on curriculum and asks that I deal with the subject. I welcome the opportunity, for I see a close tie between career education and the humanities, and hence interpret this visit as a time for some gentle proselytizing.

First, what <u>is</u> career education as viewed by the Division of Education in Washington? It is essentially an instructional strategy, aimed at improving educational outcomes by relating all teaching and learning activities to the concept of career development.

This statement may confirm your worst fears. If I had to guess at those fears, I would say they run something like this: "Career education is the mad culmination of the 'relevance' kick of recent years. It is a rejection by the Federal Government of the liberal, humanistic tradition in education in favor of a strictly pragmatic, utilitarian approach focused entirely on employment and income. Career education is, in fact, a euphemism for mechanistic job-training and it is fundamentally anti-intellectual."

I'm overstating, perhaps, but I nonetheless suspect that those remarks come pretty close to expressing sentiments of some

academic teachers in the high schools and colleges of America. As you would expect, I disavow each of them -- for reasons that I hope you will find convincing by the time I finish. But because abstract argument is so rarely convincing, let me go at this discussion by examining, first, the specific substance of career education.

We conceive of career education as beginning in kindergarten or first grade. Until the sixth grade, there would be no attempt to train students. All we are aiming at in these early years is developing an awareness of careers, a personal realization that each student will spend most of his or her life doing or being something -- and that "something" will be largely determined by work. Work may or may not carry economic motivations -- but it is seen as the product of useful living. Also, we want to give the young a sense of the remarkable number of options that will be open to them, to inform them of the manifold ways by which adults in this society go about the business of living productively.

The latest Department of Labor Dictionary of Occupational Titles lists about 23,000 different occupations. Obviously we cannot hope to teach youngsters much about so great a number. However, we can group the great majority of those titles into clusters of related occupations. A hospital orderly, a medical technician, a nurse, and a brain-surgeon, for example, are all related, so we refer to these as being in the "health cluster".

We have identified 15 such clusters. The others are agri-business and natural resources; business and office; communication and media; consumer and homemaking; construction; environment;

fine arts and humanities; hospitality and recreation; manufacturing; marine science; marketing and distribution; personal services; public service, and transportation. It's worth noting, for this audience, that the "fine arts and humanities" cluster includes poet, novelist, and painter. We are not trying to turn everybody into a machinist.

Clusters reduce the 23,000 occupational possibilities to a manageable number so that we can develop curricular materials around them. Inasmuch as most of the curricular effort at this point is being directed at the secondary level, however, most of the classroom activity for elementary-level career education must come from the initiative and imagination of individual teachers -- and some interesting things have been happening all around the country under our model development system.

A fourth-grade teacher in one Michigan community, for example, invited an industrial physicist from a nearby Pontiac facility to talk to her youngsters. His talk related conveniently to some of the concepts the class had been discussing in science. But in language arts, the youngsters had been discussing interviewing techniques, and after the physicist put his equipment away, he was grilled by the class: How long did he have to study for his job? Did he have to go to college? Was it important for a physicist to like science and math as a child? Did he get good grades in those subjects whe he was in school? How much money did he make?

It was, in sum, a genuine interview, motivated by honest curiosity. They were real questions, asked by youngsters who wanted to know something. During the year, 90 adults from different occupations -- the mayor, an electrician, an insurance salesman, a beautician -- visited that one school, opening for those youngsters a window on the world in a real way that no amount of lecturing or reading could have accomplished. In our present culture it is very difficult for a child to walk beside his father at the plow and learn about work. We are trying to find substitutes.

In seventh and eighth grade, youngsters move beyond this broad occupational awareness phase. By this time, they know something about all the clusters, and have begun to relate them to their own interests. They have learned quite a bit, too, about their own aptitudes -- which subjects they're good in, which ones they're so-so in, which ones they find the most fun.

They know enough about themselves and about careers, in short, to make a reasonably solid judgement about which of the 15 clusters appeal to them most, and to choose a few -- we think three is a good number -- for more systematic exploration. And in ninth grade, after two years of this narrowing exploration, they will know enough about the three occupational clusters they've been studying to make a tentative selection of one as their field for further and more concentrated career preparation. It is important to underscore tentative, since career education calls for open options at all levels of learning.

It is at this point (at about age 13-14) that something

undeniably and unblushingly recognizable as job-training begins. Our goal is that during the last four years of schooling --- the ninth through twelfth grades --- every youngster will develop entry-level job skills that will qualify him for employment upon leaving school, whenever he leaves.

I repeat, every youngster -- including those who intend to go on to college or some other form of postsecondary education. If, by tenth grade, a girl has decided that she wants to take a Ph.D. in molecular biology, fine; not only are we for her, but we stand in awe of her knowledge of what the words mean. Recognizing the uncertain nature of life and the changeability of young minds and spirits, however, we want to give her a fallback position if her plans don't work out --- to make sure that she can qualify for a good job even if she leaves high school before graduation. Moreover, even if that job won't be at the level to which she originally aspired, at least she will have adequate skills in an occupational area that interests her -- in this case, the health cluster. Finally, if her circumstances do improve, she retains the option and the qualification to return for higher academic training -- at any time -- perhaps years later.

This is a major point to be made about each of the occupational clusters: each includes a range of employment opportunities that can accommodate every type of aptitude, every level of intellect. The construction cluster, for instance, has room for young men who prefer outdoor, manual labor -- and, these days, for young women who prefer outdoor, manual labor. This cluster also has room for entrepreneurs who aspire to operate their own contracting business someday. It has room for

engineers concerned with the strength of materials, and for architects concerned with beauty and function. And it has room for new specialties emerging in economics and other social sciences, not the least being new fields such as environmental science, urban planning, and new-town management.

In our thinking about occupations and careers, then, we have been careful to make room for the hands and the hammer and the honest skill it takes to drive a nail straight. But we give equal voice to the imagination and the spirit, for the man who cannot fix a faucet but can dream a new concept of community. These are all parts of one whole, each with its own dignity and importance, and we make no apology for teaching the future architect what carpenter does or teaching the future carpenter the liberalizing joys of Robert Browning and Edna St. Vincent Millay. It is well past time for our educational institutions to help eliminate prejudice based on work -- to overcome the idea, passed on to us by our own parents, that some jobs are worthy and some are not, that some family heads are to be respected and others scorned, and that the best way to tell the difference is to see whether the wage earner owns a college degree or wears a tie to work.

By twelfth grade, then, our plan is that career education

will have prepared every youngster for an entry-level job in the occupational cluster of his choice. We remind ourselves that we will have about 22 percent of our young dropping out before high school graduation. If career education does not entice them to stay, at least we believe it will qualify them for something better than the streets.

But career education is not merely job-getting. Nor is it a competitor or adversary to the high traditions of academic teaching and learning. The academic skills are still the school's principal raison d'etre. But we believe young people in school and college will learn them better, with more ease and interest, because their mathematics, language arts, sciences, and social studies have been related to purposes which students perceive as important to their own future lives. Career education is not a substitute for the old curriculum, even though it entails the use of some new materials; rather, it is a new context for learning, a new way of viewing curriculum. Every teacher knows that the single, most powerful teaching force in a classroom is motivating students. We believe that career education will do that, at any level the student finds personally significant. All good teachers have intuitively and sensitively tried to relate learning to life. Career education moves us along this road, systematically, hopefully with richer materials and a better knowledge on the part of the learner as to why he is learning.

The result will be better preparation for whatever path the student chooses to follow after leaving high school, or after high school graduation. He can get a job. He can enter a technical institute for more intensive, specialized preparation for a career. Or he can enter a four-year college -- and with a much better sense of direction than most young adults bring to college today.

This has been a once-over-lightly treatment of career education as it is unfolding today as a high priority in the Office of Education.

One could go on at length, scolding ourselves over the failure of the schools to equip approximately half of our newly enfranchised 18-year-olds for college or for a job. I will not labor it. Suffice it to say here that the Office of Education is not under any delusion concerning the need for reform and the complexities of the task.

We know that relating academic teaching to the career theme cannot be accomplished in a bureau in Washington. Hence, we have established 15 advisory groups made up of teachers and practitioners in each of the occupational clusters to help us relate job requirements to basic academic skills. We have contracted with some of the Nation's leading curriculum specialists to develop high school curricula for five of the 15 clusters so far --- construction, manufacturing, transportation, public service, and communications and media. Several should be ready for pilot-testing next year. We expect to fund development of two more cluster curriculums, probably sales and office occupations,

shortly.

I am using your valuable time to describe career education theme in some detail --- because this particular audience at this particular time is very important to the success of career education (if it ultimately is successful), and because I want you to know that we have not undertaken this objective lightly. Learning from educational experiments of the past, we do not believe that a few snappy slogans and some Federal money can accomplish any serious educational reform --- and we are very candidly talking about reform. We have a staggering amount of thinking, experimentation, and refining to do, and probably a distressing number of mistakes still to make.

But at this point I want to depart from explaining what career education is in itself to talk about its relation to the humanities, because I think that you -- and all other educators interested in the humanities, the liberal arts -- also have some thinking to do, and some work to do, if the proposition is found worthy of your interest.

By now you have formed some tentative impressions about career education. With luck, my lyricism on the subject has lulled you into agreeing that career education need not spell the "Death of Intellect in the West," and that it will still be possible for a student to pursue truth and beauty, not to mention syntax and composition, without first investigating how much it pays per hour. But some of you, I'm sure, are still unconvinced -- and in sincere respect for your misgivings, I want to turn to a necessarily brief discussion of what may

be the continuing evolution of the liberal tradition in education.

Most Americans, I believe, think of formal academic education as a privilege that was once restricted to the elite in society, but gradually -- after great struggle and the passage of centuries -- became accessible to the less favored masses, to virtually everyone, in fact, who seeks it in our country. This hypothesis leads to a hasty assumption in the light of general human experience, which is that nice things are found first by the favored.

But with education, it is not true. Education in Western Europe, and notably in England, did not start at the top. It started in the middle. During most of the middle ages, both serfs and the nobles were illiterate. It was only the ambitious sons of the embryonic middle class who saw education as their avenue to upward-mobility. (Parenthetically, this phenomenon is now dominant in America, as we seek upward mobility for our own least favored.) Returning to the Middle Ages, there were two acceptable opportunities through schooling: a career in the Church or a career as a merchant. For such careers literacy was an absolute essential.* As late as the 18th century, some members of the House of Lords were still illiterate. If you find this difficult to believe, open your Henry Fielding, study Squire Western, and ask yourself if Oxford or Cambridge would claim him as an alumnus. For a more recent reference, open your Evelyn Waugh, study Sir Alastair Trumpington of Decline and Fall, and ask yourself if his presence at Scone College had any discernible relation to education.

It was not until the Renaissance, with the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman literature and language, that learning became fashionable for the upper classes. From this era, in fact, we can date the beginning of humanism in western Europe. For the first time, men could read something about themselves as men, could consider the human experience as something important in itself rather than as a reflection of the omnipotence of God, and significant therefore only in relation to afterlife and the certainties of death, judgement, heaven, or hell. And it was only after the Renaissance that the sons of wealthy men began entering the universities, competing with and often crowding out less affluent scholars. Chaucer gives us a picture of university students in the early 13th century; they were all broke.

The point is that formal education in the West started with a distinctly occupational orientation. It was not learning for its own sake. It was learning for a specific career purpose such as demanded by the market place, the church, the money lender, the healer. But with the entrance of the rich into higher education came a gradual isolation of learning from work. Rich young men, after all, would not have to work. For them, cultivation of intellect became desirable in itself, apart from any use to which a trained mind might be put.

The influx of affluent students, their freedom from the necessity of vocational preparation, the prestige of their superior status, and the secular subjects then available for study shaped the form and substance of classical education,

including a gradual cleavage between liberal and utilitarian studies. Thus, some very eloquent spokesmen for the liberal tradition received a distinctly vocational education without recognizing it. John Henry Newman, for example, whose Idea of a University remains a classic of literature as well as of educational theory, studied Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and the Church Fathers. This is as distinctly un-vocational an education as one can imagine -- unless one is studying to be, as Newman became, an ecclesiastical scholar of heroic proportions.

It seems to me that many of us who care about the humanities and work in them daily are laboring under an intellectual misconception about where we came from. Anxious sustainers of the truth, we man the battlements of our ancient castle, ready to defend it against the onslaught of science and auto mechanics and data-processing and other heathen disciplines as though they were the other side, rather than our companions. Believing that nobody over 21 will pay any attention, we vainly and self-destructively repeat unexamined formulas: "The liberal arts do not teach one how to make a living," we say, "they teach one how to live." What awful nonsense. While English teachers can rightly account for the infinite array of human need to which we bend our profession, the humanities in general need our support in the larger sense.

It is high time for us to examine more closely what we refer to as our "tradition in the humanities," and to ask ourselves whether we are passing it on alive and young, rejuvenated by our own fresh interpretation of the meaning of the

humanities for a changing world, or whether we are simply handing on an old package that somebody else told us was valuable. Knowledge is not its own end. If it were, there would be no qualitative difference between reading Toynbee and reading the World Almanac. Both convey knowledge, but the manner of the conveyance is the difference between a towering intellectual performance that lifts the spirit and commands admiration, and a compendium of facts that occasionally comes in handy. None of us reads poetry for the sake of reading a poem. We read good poetry for intellectual and aesthetic pleasure -- and intangible as these pleasures are, they are just as real as the pleasures that come from enjoying a good meal, playing a good game of tennis, or getting a good contract signed on the dotted line. These various forms of pleasure satisfy human appetites, and even though we properly distinguish among these appetites and may rank some above others, they nevertheless crave satisfaction in all of us.

What has this homily to do with career education?

There is a saying from the Talmud that goes like this: "When you stop working, you're dead." As I interpret it, this does not mean that the foreman will shoot if you lay down your shovel, or the Superintendent will frown if your daily planning book is awry. It means, rather, that when you stop working at yourself, when you regard yourself as a finished piece of goods with no prospect of growth or surprise or becoming, then you are indeed, as the advertisement says, "dead at 30, retired at 65." Work, in other words, has a central position in the

fashioning of a satisfactory human life, and I hold this to be true especially for those who dare to teach the young! We do not teach for money, nor for status, nor for some fatuous prominence, but for facilitating human happiness. And if the humanities have nothing to say to students about a matter so crucial to their future contentment and fulfillment as work, then I must ask whether humanists have not become futile curators of a world that vanished years ago, when the nobility discovered Latin.

If universal affluence ever breaks out, and the problems of poverty blessedly go away, we won't have to look far for other problems to solve: boredom, for example, is staring us in the face, and boredom -- as any psychiatrist, clergyman, or marriage counselor can tell you -- is a serious, pervasive human problem. Its remedies rest in the resources possessed by English teachers, music teachers, physical education teachers, art teachers, history teachers, social scientists.

Humanists must lend a hand in reinterpreting for our society the vital significance of work for man and its place in any modern conception of education. There are important, worthwhile distinctions to be made between liberal and utilitarian studies -- but we humanists have not been making them. Instead we have acquiesced in a cynical perspective that views work as something we put up with between nine and five so we can do what interests us after the plant closes down. At its worst, work is a dreary, painful chore. At its best in our society -- a society that can name 23,000 different jobs -- work is an opportunity for

self-exploration; at its best, work is a humanity -- and we have the chance to help our youngsters approach work as their intellectual and personal fulfillment. If teaching is not that, then what is it?

Career education aims at fulfilling some undeniably pragmatic goals, partially definable in terms of Gross National Product, taxes paid, employment increased, and welfare payments no longer needed. But it also probes some deeply human concerns, and if the humanities can stand passively by while so many human beings hurt -- while so many human beings know how to, but have forgotten why to -- then I must ask what the humanities are for.

We need humanists to help us elaborate and refine this concept of career education. We need humanists to guide our groping for these deeper human concerns on the job and off the job. And it may be that we humanists ourselves need such a highly utilitarian exercise to sweep us back into youth and remind us of our original purpose -- which is to buttress the spirit with the knowledge that another man, in another time, passed this way before, suffered and joyed as we do, and paid his dues for the magnificent privilege and heavy responsibility of being human, especially in this remarkable land of ours. Neither centuries nor social station can separate us; only our own intellectual myopia can.

Look around. Our beleaguered castle is not really being assaulted by the champions of other disciplines called occupational. They're not attacking our fortress at all. They're just detouring around it, because so many of them, including students,

don't think we guard anything worth taking. If we in the humanities continue to regard more "practical" people as our enemies, and if we continue to be theirs -- it will be our own damn fault.

As one proud and devoted English teacher, who has made a pragmatic career of what my English teachers taught me, I thank you for the courtesy of your attention, and if I have seemed critical, it is not to offend but to share with you a new idea that may or may not be successful. It will not succeed unless you and the millions of other teachers of the humanities find it valid --- and make it your own.

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